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DE RUEHCH #0450/01 1631441  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 121441Z JUN 09  
FM AMEMBASSY CHISINAU  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8045  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS CHISINAU 000450

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/UMB

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [MD](#)

SUBJECT: Parliament Approves New Government - Lupu Quits Communist Party

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: At its June 10 session, the Parliament approved Prime Minister Zinaida Greceanii's list for interim cabinet. The new cabinet is almost the same as the previous one. Ex-Speaker Marian Lupu announced his departure from the Party of Communists (PCRM), which has the potential to weaken that party in the coming electoral round. Lupu is negotiating with smaller centrist parties that did not receive sufficient votes to gain seats in the current parliament, and has not yet announced his plans. Deputies discussed amendments to electoral procedures to resolve a legal contradiction between the mandated 45-day period to hold elections after the dissolution of Parliament and the required 60-day period for an electoral campaign. Members of Parliament also reviewed amendments to the regulations on severance pay upon termination of a Parliament. The Parliament will consider these bills in committee and vote when it reconvenes on June 12. It is not clear yet whether Voronin will disband the Parliament at that time. End summary.

Interim Government Approved  
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¶2. (SBU) At the June 10 session of Parliament, Prime Minister Greceanii presented her cabinet and her government's proposed work program, as required by law. Her cabinet was roughly identical to the previous one, with only three changes. Valentin Mejinschi was dropped as Deputy Prime Minister; Ioacob Timciuc replaced Valentin Guznac as Minister of Local Public Administration; and Mihai Barbulat assumed the vacant seat of Minister of Culture. Greceanii presented the seven priorities of her new government, including integration into the EU, settlement of the Transnistria dispute and managing the economic crisis. Following a tough 30-minute session of questions from opposition deputies, her cabinet was approved.

Lupu Withdraws from Party of Communists  
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¶3. (SBU) After hints in the press a week ago, former Parliamentary Speaker Marian Lupu formally announced that he was leaving the PCRM and its parliamentary faction. In a closed meeting of the PCRM and a press conference before the parliamentary session opened, Lupu cited the PCRM's rigidity and the failure to launch a genuine dialogue among the reasons for his departure. His prepared statement was also critical of the opposition parties, stating that the positions of all parliamentary forces had become rigid and dangerous. He said that he would not participate in a campaign with messages of accusations and threats, and would not join either radical side. Lupu is now negotiating with smaller centrist parties to find a base from which to run. The assumption is that Lupu could be a unifying force for a group of smaller parties that would occupy a centrist position between the PCRM and opposition.

Legal Issues for the Parliament to Resolve  
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¶4. (SBU) The current political crisis is unprecedented. Presidents before Voronin were elected by direct popular vote, and it was only in 2001 that the parliamentary system was introduced. The current situation thus poses some legal contradictions and has exposed some gaps in the law. One such contradiction is the discrepancy between the constitutional requirement to hold repeat parliamentary elections within 45 days of the decree dissolving parliament and the electoral law requirement that the electoral campaign period be for 60 days. At the June 10 session, deputies discussed draft proposals for amending the law, and agreed to take this up in committee and vote when the Parliament reconvenes on June 12.

¶5. (SBU) A similar sticky issue arose from the regulations that provide for six months of benefits for members of Parliament in an outgoing Parliament. The law did not specify what should happen in the case of an early disbandment of Parliament. Deputies determined that a Parliament which disbands at the end of its term will get three months of severance, while in the case of an early dissolution of Parliament the deputies will receive no such benefits.

Comment

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¶6. (SBU) With Prime Minister Greceanii's cabinet confirmed, the GOM can formally function as a government until the next round of elections. Lupu's departure from the PCRM has shifted the pre-electoral political picture in Moldova. It has the potential to do some electoral damage to the Communists, and might shift the bipolar axis of confrontation in the parliament by introducing a third, centrist force. It remains to be seen what party Lupu will align with, and whether he will be successful in pulling together several leaders of smaller parties such as Dumitru Diacov, Dumitru Braghis, and Vasile Tarlev into a larger centrist coalition.

Chaudhry